

Eve magazine September issue What do we *really* mean by “education”?

From its Latin root, we learn that the word ‘education’ means ‘to lead out’, and, by implication, lead out that which *already* lies within. The great psychologist/philosopher Carl Jung, successor to Freud, went so far as to suggest that we have a kind of DNA *of the soul* as well as the body – a blueprint for our future *psychic* development. If we should entertain such a possibility, and much points to its validity, *any* education system should therefore provide conditions conducive to the optimal development of our spiritual and emotional, as well as our physical and mental, faculties. Only with the healthy integration of all these aspects of the human being, will our children be fully equipped for the game of life.

The premise underlying our current mainstream education is, however, that a child, like a blank sheet of paper, requires filling with as much data as possible by the time he leaves school - the emphasis being on *maximizing the contents* of the pot rather than *forging a larger container*. Many of us are concerned that our present-day schools are too pre-occupied with fulfilling the requirements of demanding curricula, full of pre-digested data, designed for regurgitation in examinations, and all this at earlier and earlier ages. There is a widespread consternation, that it encourages the kind of intelligence that can give the examiners what they want to hear, rather than an intelligence embedded in independence, social responsibility and moral integrity.

Interestingly enough, a recent UK survey of 254 leading companies showed that 71 % thought exam results a poor indicator of future performance. Research shows that “there is no scientific evidence that exam results or degree class predict *success* throughout life. There is even evidence suggesting the opposite.”

In the wake of Daniel Goleman's best-selling book 'Emotional Intelligence' (EQ), Education professionals are beginning to awaken to the necessity of teaching our children in a balanced way. According to Goleman, our emotions play a far greater role in thought, decision-making and individual success than is commonly acknowledged.

As opposed to IQ, 'EQ' includes self-awareness and impulse control, persistence, zeal and motivation, empathy and social deftness. *These* are the qualities that mark people who excel, whose relationships flourish and who are stars in the workplace. A balanced education is achieved by paying as much attention in the curricula to emotional wellbeing as to intellectual agility, as emotional lessons a child learns actually *sculpt the brain's circuitry*.

In many European countries, formal teaching of the three Rs (Reading, wRiting and 'Rithmetic') does not begin until age seven. And some governments have now be roused to act upon evidence that damage is caused to both creativity and mental health by an overly competitive system at too young an age. Some educationalists believe that comparing children gives them a sense of failure too young. They suggest that it is rather by cultivating self-esteem and inner strength as they strive to improve their own personal bests that our children will thrive in this competitive world and be equal to all its challenges.

When we put our children under pressure to grow up too quickly, we rob them of the chance to develop qualities that are essential and unique to their age. The fast-paced society we know today has little respect for the needs of children. Education is therefore called upon to create spaces

where children can truly experience their childhood. By so doing, the qualities, which contribute to creative independence in adulthood, are nurtured and enhanced, qualities that would stand in opposition to the powerful, contemporary cultural currents based on materialism.

Researchers have long documented how much young children learn intuitively through their bodies, and how this lays a critical foundation for later conscious comprehension of the world. Hand-eye coordination seems to be especially important to later academic achievement. Studies have shown that, not only is more of the brain involved in *play* than was suspected, but it also seems to activate higher cognitive processes. "There's enormous cognitive involvement in play", says Mark Bekoff in an article for the New Scientist, June 9th 2001. He believes that play creates a brain that has greater behavioural flexibility and improved potential for learning in later life: "It's about more connectedness throughout the brain." "Play just lights up everything", says neuropsychologist Stephen Sivy. He speculates that by allowing connections between brain areas that might not normally be connected, *play* enhances learning.

From the adult point of view, play and work seem to be totally incompatible. We often believe child's play to be simple, superficial, even unimportant. Anyone concerned with bringing up or teaching children soon becomes aware of the fact that play demands one's full, serious and undisturbed application. In *play* children develop skills on the physical level and their faculties ripen and differentiate. The imagination of children immediately affects the will. Here, the powers of initiative and creativity, which are so important in later life, are nurtured at their very source.

During their first years children learn by imitating everything and everybody they encounter. That is why they should experience actions around them, which express love and a reasoned approach to life. Children have an urge toward perfecting their abilities. Practice becomes an important element of their lives and with it they find their own way from play to work.

In the ages of the Primary School, from 7-14, all that meets the child in its environment is transformed into inner pictures and images and so the teacher must respond with *artistry* and not just purely the intellect. The intellect comes into its own when the pupils pass into adolescence. A good lesson is *a work of art*. The ability to enthuse the students and to impart to them a love of learning is something that will remain with them for their whole lives. How is this to be achieved? The teacher must master the subject and be able to convey the requisite knowledge but, rather than being presented in a pre-digested form, it should be alive and inspiring.

Increasing numbers of parents are looking for the kind of education that offers a more uplifting view of human potential. *An education that is essentially concerned with the healthily integrated development of the physical, mental and emotional development of our children*. This is not always easy to achieve given that in our modern environment increasing emphasis is placed on academic work, displacing manual and artistic work and leading to imbalance. An overly academic curriculum leads to an overly intellectual approach to life, often to the detriment of our ability to get things done, our intuition, compassion, sense of community and social responsibility. Today children from an early age are encouraged by media advertising and peer pressure to be passive consumers and collectors of *things* and this passivity leads to the stagnation of the human spirit. People deeply need to experience the satisfaction and joy of being *creative and productive* in order to develop a sense of self-worth and self-fulfillment. Giving our children the opportunity to bring to their family and the community the fruits of their own labour,

for example, is a preparation for and a foretaste of the creative contribution they will make in the larger social and economic world.

We need an education that consciously nourishes the inner life of children in order to start them off on a lifelong process of self-discovery. It should place before them eminent persons – some of them great religious figures, some of them not – but all of them persons who overcame weakness, transformed themselves, expanded the horizons of the human heart, and inspired social change. All the essential elements of a holistic education must be imparted within the context of an *excellent* academic foundation, so that future generations can enter the global arena with confidence, clarity of thought, wisdom of the heart and practical skills.

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